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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

THE PRE-RAPHAELITE SCHOOL.

BY WILLIAM MORRIS.



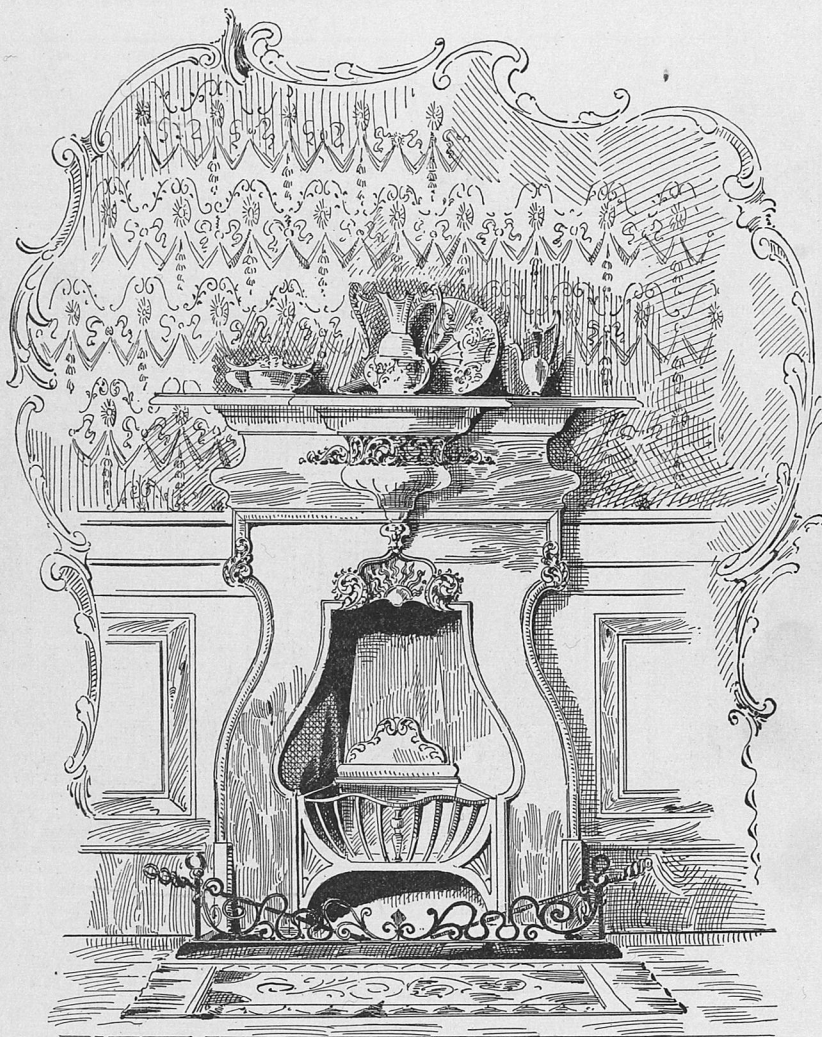
At a private view of the pre-Raphaelite exhibition in Birmingham on Friday, the 2d Oct., Mr. William Morris delivered an address, in the long room of the Art Gallery, in reference to the rise and purpose of the school of painters of which the exhibition about to be opened was illustrative.

Mr. Morris said that he proposed to speak mainly on the school of painters who were called "The pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood." There was all the more reason for his doing so because their principal doctrines and tenets had been successful—had impressed themselves upon the present generation of English people, and he thought to a certain extent also on the artists of France. The pre-Raphaelites were a very small body of men. The three leading names were those of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Everett Millais and Holman Hunt, and to these were added various others, some of whom belonged to the school, although he did not think they were enrolled in the brotherhood. The most noteworthy of the painters of those who were not thus enrolled was Ford Madox Brown. They were not only few, but young. They had to make themselves all the reputation they attained to, and they began with

what might be really characterized as a very audacious attempt. Their attempt was a definite revolt against the academical art which, in the main, brooded over all the schools of civilized Europe; and this revolt might be considered as a phase of that great general revolt against academicism in literature as well as in the arts. In literature the revolt had taken place very much

earlier. There were many reasons for that priority of time, of which the principal seemed to him to be that the art of painting, being so much more technical than literature, depended much more upon tradition than ever literature did; and that tradition, however poor it might be, however much it might have fallen from its high estate, had very great power to keep people from changing. In literature, therefore, a revolt was sooner made, and its effects were plainer to be seen. It was about the year 1848 that the general first appearance of the pre-Raphaelites was made before the public. The special and particular doctrine they inculcated was that of naturalism. That doctrine at first sight seemed to contain a self-evident proposition. But it meant a great deal when laid down as against the rather worn-out tradition which dominated the

whole of the artistic schools of Europe. He remembered distinctly that as a boy, when he had pictures offered to him, he could not understand what they were about. He said to himself, "I suppose that has got the sort of thing in it which ought to be in a picture. There is nothing to be said against it, no doubt;" but plainly he took little interest in it, and he supposed that that was the case with nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand of people who had not received technical instruction in the art of painting. Even up to the present day the greater number of what he should call laymen in these matters did not feel any very great exaltation when they first saw an old master. The pre-Raphaelites, on the other hand, were perfectly naturalistic, and



Wood Mantel. S G Wilkes

one would have thought that the public would receive their attempts with acclamation—would say, "Well, here at least is something we can understand. Here are visible sheep, such as we see every day." Strange to say, the public did exactly the reverse. They said, "Why, these things are not like nature." They did not mean that; they meant to say, "They are not like pictures!"—

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which they were not, as pictures then were. There was, however, one man at least who, although he had been brought up in what might be called—not in contempt, but for the sake of definition—the old-fashioned drawing-master school, and although his master was Mr. J. D. Harding, looked

sonal reputation, and achieved success, he thought, as a school. But it was necessary to know a little more of what was the meaning of the word “naturalism.” He could conceive a certain kind of naturalism which could not be very interesting. There was a good deal of talk nowadays about such naturalism as that



DESIGN FOR MANTEL, BY SAMUEL G. WILKES.

at these pre-Raphaelite paintings with open eyes. That man was John Ruskin, and he became immediately their champion before the public. No doubt they needed such a champion very badly. However, they made way, and finally won great per-

which amounted to very little more than a bare statement of fact by means of the art of painting. Pictures painted with that end in view were scarcely works of art, but rather something on the border-line between works of art and scientific

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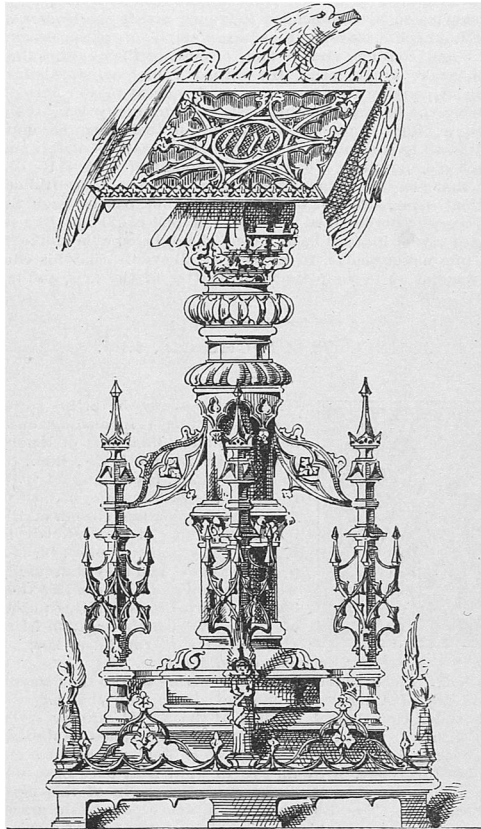
statements. The pre-Raphaelite pictures were not in the least like that. They aimed at the conscientious presentment of incident. The brotherhood came to the conclusion not only that they should paint well, but that this good painting—the excellent execution, the keen insight, the careful skill—should be an instrument for telling some kind of a story to the beholder. No doubt, in the early days of pre-Raphaelitism, it was rather the fashion to deery any sort of convention. That was a reaction from the tyranny of the weak and unworthy convention against which they had raised the standard of rebellion. But every work of art, whether imitative or suggestive, must be founded on some convention or other. The real point was that that convention should not be, so to say, a conventional convention—should be a convention you had found-out for yourself, whether by deducting from history or whether by contemplating nature.

But the pre-Raphaelites went even further than the mere presentment of incidents: they conscientiously considered the due and proper incidents that were necessary in order to make a work of art. Perhaps this third side of their doctrines was less considered by the public, was much more difficult to put before the public than the other two sides. Of the original artists of the school Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the one who had this side most before his eyes—the side, namely, of ornament. No picture was thought to be complete unless it had definite, harmonious, regulated, conscious beauty. It ought to be ornamental. It ought to be a part of a beautiful whole, in a room or a hall, or what not. He had some hesitation in speaking about their townsman, Mr. Burne-Jones, because he was an intimate friend of that last great ally of the school; but the truth must be told that the man who added this absolutely necessary element of perfect ornamentation was Burne-Jones, and that only when he came to the aid of the school did it become fully apparent that pre-Raphaelitism was a continuation of the art that had been current throughout Europe when Raphael began to be put forward as the great master of the Renaissance. Something might now be said of the individual members of the school. He should say that of the pure naturalism of the school, not thinking so much about tale-telling as about the presentment of natural form, Millais was the leading representative. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Holman Hunt and Ford Madox Brown were all of them equally concerned with the conscientious representation of incident. In looking at their pictures it would be seen that they always tried to knock the nail in very hard, that there was something going on, something being done, in the picture. At their best they were successful in doing what every great artist tried to do, in really convincing the beholder that the event he represented could have happened in no other way than that in which he represented it to have happened. That in point of fact was the thing aimed at in all the art which might be called dramatic art—or perhaps epical art would be the better word. Then, again, as he had said, Rossetti and Burne-Jones were those representatives of the school who had leaned most towards the ornamental side of art. Burne-Jones especially had really brought the ornamental interest of his art about as far as the thing could go. Both Rossetti and Burne-Jones had very little to do with representing the scenes of ordinary modern life as those scenes occurred before our eyes.

One often heard this brought against artists of that school as a shortcoming. It was a shortcoming. But was the shortcoming due to the individual artist or to the public at large? An artist in representing a modern event must do something to qualify or soften the ugliness and sordidness of the surroundings of life in our day. That was the case not only with pictures, but in literature. Mr. Hardy and others, who were supposed to represent modern life in their novels, took care to surround their modern scenes with an atmosphere of out-of-the-way country life one never met in the country heroes and heroines like those which Mr. Hardy described. In painting, indeed, one could not get quite so far away from the facts as they could in literature. By all means, if anyone really felt moved to treat modern life, let him do so in the best way he possibly could; but he had not the right in the circumstances, considering the evasions he was absolutely bound to make, to blame his brother artists who felt compelled to turn back to the life of past times, or rather whose imagination must have some garb, and perhaps naturally took the garb of some period at which the surroundings of life were not ugly but beautiful. The principles of the pre-Raphaelite school, so far as they inculcated pure naturalism, had more or less succeeded. So far as they went towards the representation of incident—on their epical side—

they had not succeeded so well, perhaps, because, after all, for the production of works of that kind were required either people of stupendous genius, of whom very few could be born in one epoch, or a great homogeneous school of tradition which was able to use up all the various qualities of the lesser men, and combine them in one harmonious whole.

For a similar reason the side of the school which tended towards ornament had made less impression still upon the age. That could not be wondered at because, after all, what was all the ornamental side of art but a part of architecture, and architecture could not flourish, could not be an art in a satisfactory sense, unless it were the spontaneous expression of the



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S.G. Wilkes

pleasure and will of the whole people. In our present chaotic condition art could not be got out of the combined efforts of the people at large; it must be simply the work and the expression of individual ideas and individual capacity working towards a certain end. That was one reason why these galleries with their pictures were so interesting. But galleries and museums and the like were not of the slightest use to a population that had not some idea of art before it went into the gallery or museum. You cannot educate a man who does not desire to be educated. Surely the desire must exist, if not universally, or even very widely. Yet it did exist in some degree or another, and granted that the desire existed, then all places like that museum, and especially picture galleries—if the pictures were only sufficiently well chosen—might be of the very

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greatest possible advantage to those people who wanted to put themselves more or less in the ranks with the great artists of past and present times. They must feed the love of art by showing works which were not only acknowledged to be great works, but which they could at once feel to be so. People sometimes talked as though "the man in the street" were the proper person to apply to for a judgment on works of art. But, as a matter of fact, "the man in the street," instead of being unsophisticated, was sophisticated through and through with the rags and dross of the arts that were current. In music the "unsophisticated" person usually took up not the finest works of art, but the ordinary, feeblest, banal tunes which were dinned into his ears at every street corner; and so it was in the plastic arts.

In conclusion he commended to young artists the leaders of the pre-Raphaelite movement as an example of patience and diligence and courage, and, in fact, of most of the qualities that went to make great men. He warned young artists against stopping at copying the mannerisms of a great master instead of allowing the example of the master to gradually lead them to do something definite for the world on their own account. He invited all to continue to study the great masters of this and of all schools, not from a conventional point of view. He did not say that one should merely admire a picture because it bore some great name, whether one liked it or not, but let each distinctly say whether he liked it or not. If one could not like it, he did not say let him not be ashamed of not being able to like it, but let him acknowledge, to himself, at all events, that his education was not quite complete on the matter of the arts, and try to make it so.

JOHN J. DE ZOUCHE CO., LIM.



AMONGST the many beautiful stores devoted to house furnishing business in Philadelphia, that of Messrs. John J. De Zouche & Co., Lim., on Chestnut street, is very attractive by reason of the vast quantity of beautiful house furnishings stored in the building, which is six stories in height. The policy of the firm is a progressive one, and they thoroughly will maintain the high position they have won by providing the public of that city with the most fashionable selection of furniture, keeping

pace with the varying demands of public taste.

Although the Romanesque style is giving way to the demand for furniture of a light and fanciful description that may be classed under the general heading of the XVIII century style, yet the firm still present a fine display of Romanesque designs in sideboards, bedroom suites, chairs, chiffonieres, and so on, and house furnishers, with an eye to what is at once beautiful and economical, ought not to overlook the merits of this most interesting style. The Romanesque furniture possesses a graceful simplicity which is enhanced by the delicate bits of carving on the tops of the chairs, bed-posts, and so on. The style of workmanship is peculiar to America, for there is nothing resembling it constructed in Europe. There are shown hall tables, hall stands and hall mirrors, finished in light oak, with delicate Romanesque carvings that are very artistic. A bedroom suite in birds-eye maple in the Romanesque style is a dream of the woodworker's art, and nothing, we think, in the way of a seat can excel in simple elegance a Romanesque chair, a great many designs of which are shown constructed in the various woods.

In juxtaposition with such furnishings as these, we find a great variety of furniture that is a reproduction of the distinguishing features of the Louis Quinze and Louis Seize styles. Strictly speaking, the elaborately shaped lines and highly ornamental character of the Louis Quinze, for example, scarcely admit of economic reproduction. The shaping necessarily calls for a greater amount of labor and skillful workmanship than does the production of the more straightforward class of cabinet work based upon straight lines, and the question of the hour is how is the demand for something inexpensive in the same construction for more ordinary trade purposes to be met?

The De Zouche Company, Lim., are exhibiting a great many buffets, bedroom suites, china, closets, and so on, that are in all respects correct reproductions of the Louis styles, with, per-

haps, the omission of the more extravagant ornamental details that were incorporated into the original furniture. There are also Empire cabinets, decorated with ornolu finishings, and chiffonieres with brass railings, that can be purchased at prices at which, a few years ago, it would be considered impossible to produce the furniture.

It is surprising what an important piece of furniture the screen has become in connection with the more fanciful class of cabinet goods, and the innumerable forms in which it has recently appeared in the market. This, with the card table, the five o'clock tea table, and fancy writing table and other articles rendered necessary by the claims of friendship and etiquette are shown in lavish profusion. There are envelope card tables, the leaf of which has four triangular flaps hinged thereto, which, opening out, forms a respectable sized table. In the same way some of the writing tables do not at first appear to have anything to do with the writing, but on opening a number of flaps, an entire desk is revealed to view, with spaces for pens, ink, paper and correspondence.

Many of the china closets, whether in the Louis Quinze, or Empire styles, are already filled with china, which gives a correct idea of how the cabinet will appear when fitted out with its contents at home.

This enterprising firm have brought every section of furniture under their control, from the hall to the top of the house. They are doing a large business in brass bedsteads, an extensive demand for which has lately sprung up in this country. In brass bedsteads the art of the designer seems to have lagged behind the progress made in wood furniture, and there is room for an artistic innovation in the way of harmonizing the brass bedsteads with the prevailing styles of furniture.

This firm do a large business in the making of high-class furniture from special designs, for which they employ the best designing talent obtainable. Much of the furniture shown is from special designs by the firm's designer, Mr. James Thomson, whose artistic work is already well known to our readers.

A FIRESIDE corner is a very pretty and cosy idea. Slender pillars supporting a delicate grille work are placed about two and one-half feet from the chimney, with which it is connected by a curtain rod. The grille work is nearly as high as the ceiling, and does not interfere with the perspective of the room or hide the fireplace or mantel decoration. On either side, within the precincts are two chimney seats or settees, upholstered in harmony with the rest of the room. Curtains are hung from the curtain pole, and can be draped back, or when drawn give a very cosy effect on a winter's night.

CENTERS of heavy linen are very effective on the dining-table when couched with gold and with the background fish scaled with white silk. The couching is of the heavy Japanese wash gold, which has on the silken background the effect of gold brocade. The hem is simple hem stitched or may be finished with a fall of lace. Heavy or fine sheer linens, sateens, silk and bolting cloth are all used as centers, and newer than any of these is a silk material called "mail cloth," which is especially adapted to center-pieces, because it is woven so like huckaback that darning is a simple matter. It is decorated with a bold design, either outlined or couched, a favorite combination for which is delicate green and white.

THE employment of imitation stones in connection with embroidery and their use upon fancy knickknacks, is very popular among skillful workers in decorative arts, as they impart to such articles a sparkling effect which is very good if carefully managed, so, as to gleam out unexpectedly and in unlooked for places. The jewels are in a great variety of tints, and represent topazes, both pink and yellow, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, diamonds, opals, and aqua marines. Two holes are ready pierced in each gem, by which it is sewed on. The stitches which hold down the gems should be as invisible as possible, and for this reason it is advisable to choose fine sewing silk, which matches the color of the stone as nearly as can be. A mistake readily made is the mixing of half a dozen colors and kinds of stones upon the same piece of embroidery. As a general rule the result is better when only two sorts, or at most three, are employed.